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Dear Augustana

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Roberson, Alice. "Dear Augustana" (2015). *Mary Wollstonecraft Writing Award*.

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Alice Roberson

Fall 2014/15

WGST-201 01 Women & Change in the US

Jane Simonsen

Dear Augustana: Reflective Prose

Alice Roberson

September 12, 2014

WGST

Dear Augustana,

Dear Augustana, I don't believe in God. Or gods, or any sort of pantheon of higher entities and angels who will make sure that I am alright. I don't "do" destiny, or luck. When I find myself in times of trouble, I believe in love. True Love. I believe that someday someone will look at me and see the love of their lifetimes, and that if I practice loving people unconditionally, one day I will be worthy of this love. I just need to be pretty enough, nice enough, kind enough, worthy to be loved. This is why I stayed. He told me he was broken. That I could save him. I just had to not give up. I knew he wasn't my prince, but maybe he could be my damsel in distress, and I would save him. I would save him, and then someone would come and save me. When I didn't leave my bed for three days. When I felt broken and ruined. When there was no love in his eyes, I thought that I could love enough for the both of us. And I did. I loved so hard, until I couldn't love anymore. That is why I stayed.

Dear Augustana, The pamphlet that Sandee Bills gave us says that a good relationship is all about respect. He must respect, she must respect, they must respect, I must respect myself. Which is hard, when the disrespecting of women is inherent in the system. How can you respect yourself when the system tells you that unless you are strong and powerful you do not deserve respect, but if you are strong and powerful no one will love you? We must choose between love and respect and either way we are left vulnerable to harm. This is the patriarchy. We are stuck between a rock and a hard-on and either way we lose. This is why we stay.

Dear Augustana, I've been talking to a friend about the nature of love. About whether it can be unconditional. His mother claims that she loves him unconditionally,

that no matter what he does and where he goes she will always love him. "Not if I chopped off her pinky toe." He says, "If I started hacking off bits of her body, she would not love me anymore." I think she might. Women give and men take, and if they already have the shattered pieces of your heart and soul what is a pinky toe between lovers? We are taught to love differently. When Princess Leia tells Han Solo that she loves him, he says, "I know." The society that we live in tells women to love and be kind and gentle and men to be strong. Men are taught that love is sex and strength and protection. All the things a woman wants. That if he is all these things she will love him. But what if he is not? Girls go for the bad guy for the tough man for Han Solo. So they hit. But what if he is? What If he is big and strong and tough and bad. He will still hit anyways. In case she hadn't noticed what a man he is. This is why he fights.

Dear Augustana, Maybe he loves her too. He never says it, but she imagines she can feel it in his touch and his kiss, and when his touch gets rough she sees it in his eyes. This is why we stay.

Dear Augustana, Intersectional means that I understand, even if I don't. That her pain isn't mine and her life isn't mine, but she is a human being and I will support her right to be hurt. Because you can't just choose to oppress my identity as a woman. You oppress me. A human. You oppress my gender, and my sexuality, and my race, and my religion; all at the same time. If oppression is intersectional, than the struggle against it should be as well. I may not be her and she might not be me, but if she was me and I was her. I would want her to fight for me. This is empathy. This is why she fights.

Dear Augustana, I was raped. It wasn't my fault. I was young. I was drunk. I knew his last name. I knew where he lived. I did it again and again and again and again. I

have my regrets. I didn't tell. Didn't say anything. But neither did they. And they knew. They knew I cried. I thought they were my friends. I thought he could change. He said I was so good. So beautiful. So kind. I thought that, that was enough. I don't want to be hated. That is why I stayed.

Dear Augustana, The three Ds of Do the Right Thing Aren't Enough. Tell him not to rape me. Tell him that I am good and kind, even when I'm not. Tell him that I am a human when I am drunk. That I am human when I sleep. That I am human when I make mistakes. Tell him that I am not his sister, that I am not his mother, but please don't hurt me anyways. Tell him that my low cut shirts and short skirts are not invitations. Tell him that my low cut shirts and short skirts are low cut shirts and short skirts. I thought that this was obvious. Tell them not to hate me. Tell them not to blame me. I didn't mean to. I didn't want to. Tell them not to blame me. So I won't have to stay.

Dear Augustana, Tell me I am pretty. That I am worthy to be loved. Tell me that I don't have to stay. Treat me kindly. Be good to me. So when he tells me I am ugly, that I am stupid, that I am worthy to be whipped. I know he is wrong. Tell me not to stay.

Dear Augustana, I am young. So young, and he is young too. We don't know any better. I thought we were here to learn. Here to grow. Tell me how to grow.

Dear Augustana, Tell him to be good. Teach him how to cry. Tell her to be strong. Teach her that she can say no. It's all just made up stuff. What makes me a good woman. What makes him a good man. Tell them it's all the patriarchy. That old thing. Tell them that we are here to grow. Not to shrink out of fear or hate or anger. And when you tell them. Please mean it. So they won't have to.

Dear Augustana, We deserve better.